No. 13

The
REDEMPTION
of
Marie Gordon
THE TRAGIC STORY OF
WRONGED WOMANHOOD
Price 10¢

"May I speak to you for a moment, please?" begged the governess.
"What is it?" he inquired in his usual gentle tone.

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MARIE DESMOND had spoken in an authoritative tone. It was a tone which betrayed the mistress. And she was used to being obeyed. Although her anger had risen quickly, she made no display of it. Her voice was perhaps a little softer as she spoke again.

"You know it is too cool in this room, Nora," she said. "Look how the poor child is shivering. Would you have her take a heavy cold, like that little brother of hers?"

Miss Evans darted a glance full of hatred at the speaker.

"If you want that window shut, shut it yourself," she snorted, and left the room.

The new governess closed the window, then took a seat at Harry's bed, with Phyllis on her knee. Her heart was too full for utterance.

When at last she was able to speak without danger of breaking down, she said to the little girl cuddled to her breast:

"Is this the first time Nora struck you?"

"Oh, no," Phyllis answered without hesitation. "She is always so mean to us. The other day, before you were here, Miss Desmond, she struck Harry on the mouth. She wanted him to stop coughing."

"What an outrage!" exclaimed the grief-stricken mother, and fought back the angry tears.

Ah, how glad she was to be back so that she might prevent a repetition of such brutality. And whose fault was it? Whose but that unfeeling, pleasure-loving stepmother's.

But there was to be an end to that now, Marie vowed with all her soul. Never again should her children be subjected to such brutal treatment.

While she continued hugging the little girl to her

bōsom, she turned to the boy, who lay quietly in his bed.

"How are you this morning, my darling?" she inquired softly.

Harry looked up at her with tears in his unnaturally bright eyes.

"Do—do you think that I am going to die soon?" he asked pitifully.

The question took Marie utterly by surprise, and her heart stopped beating for a moment.

"Why—what do you mean, honey-pet?" she whispered after a moment of heart breaking silence. "What makes you think you are going to die? Did anyone ever suggest such a thing to you?"

The boy nodded.

"Yes, Miss Desmond. I was told that more than once."

"Who told you, dear?"

"Nora," he replied.

"Nora?" aghast.

"Yes."

"What did she say, Harry?"

"A while ago she stood in the hall talking to one of the servants," the boy began to relate. "The door of my room was half open. I heard her say: 'Harry can't last much longer. I suppose it would be a good thing for all of us in this house if he died. He is so much trouble, and besides, if he should happen to live, he would be a cripple and a burden to Mrs. Gordon."

A groan wrung itself from Marie's breast. She let Phyllis glide from her knee and leaned over the boy.

"No—no, my darling, you will—will not die," she cried brokenly. "Don't think of what Nora said. You are in God's hands and mine. If we both work together, you will get well again. Please forget what you heard,

and never mention it again to me, for it makes me very unhappy."

With an unexpected motion the little boy threw his arms about the neck of the new governess.

"Last night I dreamed of our dead mamma," he said earnestly. "I won't have to be afraid of speaking to you about her, Miss Desmond, will I?"

"No, darling—no!" Marie almost sobbed.

"Well, mamma spoke so kindly to me," the boy went on in the same earnest manner. "And she smiled so nice—just like you. Oh, how I wished we had her back again. It was so cruel of God to take her away. But I am thankful God sent you to us, Miss Desmond. You will never go away, will you? Then Nora can't beat Phyllis and me any more."

Marie hugged the boy, her hot tears flowing unrestrained.

"Indeed, I am not going to leave you and Phyllis," she sobbed. "I'll be like a mother to both of you. I'll be a real mother, and I'll love you just as your mother would have done, were—were she still alive."

It took Marie some time to regain her composure.

As if drawn by some strong invisible magnet, the two children clung to her with an affection that constantly filled her with an emotion she had trouble in checking. The morning passed quietly and pleasantly.

The new governess went about her duties in a manner that left no doubt as to her thoroughness. The clock had just struck the noon hour when Annie came into the nursery. Her features betrayed grave concern.

"Mrs. Gordon wants to see you right away, Miss Desmond," she announced hurriedly, her eyes conveying a significant message to Marie.

"What for?" asked the latter, surprised.

"I—I don't know," the girl stammered. "But I

saw Nora Evans come from the drawing room a moment ago."

"Very well." Marie rose. "I shall go at once. Please stay with the children until I return, will you?"

"Indeed, I will," said Annie.

The new governess quitted the nursery with a firm step and went downstairs. Something told her that trouble was brewing. She found the mistress of the house seated in the drawing room, reading a magazine.

"Did you wish to see me?" she asked, her voice toned down.

All she got in return was a haughty stare.

Marie felt the blood rushing to her face at the studied effrontery offered her by the second Mrs. Gordon. It was an effrontery she could not let pass unchallenged. She resented it bitterly.

"Annie tells me that you wish to speak to me, Mrs. Gordon," she spoke again in a louder tone.

"Please have the consideration to wait until I am ready to talk to you," Alice replied in a tone which expressed contempt. "You see I am reading, don't you, Miss Desmond?"

The latter was about to make a heated retort, when the mistress of the house threw the magazine on the table.

For almost a full minute she regarded the new governess with an expression of open hostility. Several times her lips opened and closed again.

"Miss Desmond," she began finally, "I am afraid I did not make myself sufficiently plain when I engaged you. Above all things, I want you to conform strictly with my directions and rules in regard to the bringing up and educating the children.

"No matter what my orders may be, you are to obey them without question. Let that be thoroughly un-

derstood. And, please, understand also that the least disobedience on your part will result in your immediate dismissal."

"Yes," Marie said, her head bowed.

"Nora Evans has entered a serious complaint against you," Alice went on in the same strident tone. "I think a great deal of Nora, and won't stand having her offended. I will not have her interfered with in the treatment of the children. They usually get what they deserve."

"Pardon me if I disagree with you, Mrs. Gordon," Marie said quietly. "Miss Evans' brutality caused me——"

"Whatever Nora does is in compliance with my orders," the mistress of the house broke in with some vehemence. "I want you to understand that you have absolutely no right to interfere with her."

"Not even when she beats those defenseless tots unmerciful?" asked Marie indignantly.

"No, not even when she does that," came back swiftly. "And I don't believe that Nora ever beat the children unmercifully."

At this juncture Philip Gordon entered the room unobserved and remained standing at the door. His wife's loud voice had brought him from the library, and he wanted to find out what the trouble was.

The position he held and that of the two women, enabled him to hear and see without being seen himself.

"Really, Mrs. Gordon," Marie followed up her plea, "you don't expect me to stand by without objecting if Nora Evans mistreats the children."

"Nora does not mistreat them," returned Alice shrilly. "They must be taught obedience, for they were shamefully neglected. They had no moral training heretofore.

"One could not expect such a thing from their own mother who deserted them to elope with her lover. No wonder they have become what they are. They are both showing the traits they inherited from their mother."

Marie turned deathly white. She seized the edge of the table and kept her temper only with an effort.

"You are doing those dear children an injustice, Mrs. Gordon," she said firmly. "They are both good and affectionate. Nora does not like them. That is evident even to a stranger. So long as I am their governess, I shall not permit any one to abuse them."

"They are not abused!" Alice denied, her anger rising.

"Again I must disagree with you," came from the other. "This morning while I was dressing, I heard little Phyllis scream. I ran into the nursery and found Nora Evans beating her with her fist. Think of it, with her fist.

"No matter how much the little girl was at fault, I can not approve of such brutal methods of correction. It is inhuman. And as long as I am here as the children's governess, I will not permit Nora Evans to beat them."

The second Mrs. Gordon fixed a scornful glance upon the speaker.

"Miss Desmond," she said icily, "I forbid you to talk to me in that tone of voice. You forget your position. You forget that you are addressing the mother of those children. Has it occurred to you that you owe me an explanation for your impudent conduct toward me?"

"I had no intention of being impudent," was the slow response. "Please Mrs. Gordon——"

"Then what do you call it?" the latter demanded heatedly. "You are argueing with me as if I were one of the servants. That is something I will not tolerate. The

best thing you can do is to look for another position. You are entirely too arrogant and impudent to suit me."

"But you — you don't mean that I am discharged?" Marie stammered and held out her hands in supplication.

"Exactly that," came back swiftly. "And the sooner you find another position, the better it will please me."

Marie reeled back as if struck by a terrible blow.

This meant that she was to go—to leave her own beloved children at the mercy of this woman and Nora Evans. She could not grasp the frightful possibility of such a thing.

Chapter 42

"COME TO ME!"

PHILIP GORDON'S quiet entrance into the room was most opportune, and it was not without dramatic possibilities. He was not the kind of a man who would play the eavesdropper or the spy, but something indefinable caused him to remain a silent listener. Was it the voice of this new governess? Had it awakened within him bitter thoughts of the past?

She stood with her back turned to him, her tall, slender figure sharply outlined.

The expression on his handsome face told very plainly that he did not approve of his wife's action. As a matter of fact he resented the summary dismissal of this Miss Desmond.

But Philip was a very tactful man. Instead of assailing Alice with a storm of protests, he advanced slowly and quietly, the merest shadow of a smile playing about the corners of his mouth.

The instant his second wife saw him, she seemed startled.

"What has happened, Alice?" he inquired with customary gentleness. "You seem all worked up about something. You know," he added solicitously, "you should avoid becoming excited."

Alice shrewdly feigned utter exhaustion. She leaned back in the chair and closed her eyes.

"Oh, this continued trouble and vexation about the children is killing me," she complained. "There is no end to it. No one has the least consideration for me."

Philip looked down upon her with a puzzled frown.

For quite a while he stood thus without speaking. Then he turned to the new governess.

"What is the trouble, Miss Desmond?" he asked not unkindly. "Will you enlighten me, please?"

Marie met his eyes bravely and she imagined she saw him start.

"This morning I caught Nora Evans in the nursery brutally beating little Phyllis," she said, her voice under perfect control. "I objected perhaps a trifle too strenuously. Miss Evans reported the matter to your—to Mrs. Gordon, and I received notice to look for another position."

A few moments of intense silence followed. The master of the house stared at his wife, then at the governess.

The latter, trying hard to keep up her courage, wondered what action he would take in the matter. Would he side with Alice and thus sanction Nora's brutality, or would he support her?

Very slowly and very deliberately, he approached the table and struck the bell. The silvery sound had hardly died away when one of the servants entered.

"Please tell Nora that I want to see her at once," he said, his voice enunciating each word distinctly.

Alice suddenly lost her attitude of exhaustion. She became keenly alive to the situation and raised herself from the soft cushions supporting her. The tone in which she spoke gave ample evidence of her state of mind.

"What do you want with Nora, Phil?" she demanded.

"I want to see her, that's all," he responded a little impatiently.

"But what for?" his wife persisted. "I hope you are not going to scold her, for she only obeyed my

orders."

"Your orders?" Phil wheeled upon her. "Do you mean to tell me that you ordered Nora to brutally beat my baby girl? If that is the case, I must——" he stopped abruptly because Nora came into the room.

The latter, a derisive smile upon her lips, showed signs of uneasiness when she found herself in the presence of three people instead of the usual one.

The smile quickly disappeared, but her attitude was none the less impudent.

"I have been told that you beat Phyllis, with your fists this morning," the master of the house addressed her.

"That—that is a lie!" she cried brazenly. "I did not——"

"Wait a moment, please," Phil interrupted. "I happen to know that it is true, Nora. Now I don't want that sort of thing to happen again if you care to hold your position in this house. From this day on, Miss Desmond here, will have exclusive charge of my children. There must be no interference on your part.

"Furthermore," he went on emphatically, "so far as the children are concerned, you are to take your orders from Miss Desmond. Now if that arrangement doesn't suit you, I suggest that you look for another place without delay."

Tears of joy filled Marie's eyes. Ah, how glad she was that Phil still loved his children and that she had found a protector in him.

Nora Evans, her shifty gaze wandering from her mistress to the new governess, was too amazed to utter a sound. What did it all mean? Never before had the master of the house shown himself as its ruler.

But why remain silent when she had the unqualified backing of her mistress?

With a defiant toss of her head, she said:

"I am answerable for my conduct to Mrs. Gordon only."

"You are answerable to me so far as the care of my children is concerned," Phil reminded her coldly. "Now I don't want another word out of you, Nora. Please leave the room."

At this Alice jumped up and faced her husband, trembling with rage.

"I don't enjoy being treated with so little consideration, Phil!" she exclaimed. "You are humiliating me in the presence of servants. I resent that keenly. I ordered Nora to look after the children because Annie insists on spoiling them.

"Phyllis showed her usual obstinacy this morning by refusing to put on the dress I bought for her. Whatever punishment Nora inflicted upon her, she deserved. I don't think that Miss Desmond had any right whatever to interfere."

Philip's eyes narrowed and there was an angry glint in them.

"We have had enough care and misery through Harry's sickness," he returned, "and I don't want Phyllis' health jeopardized because of a whim of yours. But least of all will I allow my own flesh and blood to be beaten by a coarse woman like this Nora Evans, who has not the faintest idea of the care and management of children."

He paused a moment, then added in a more conciliatory tone:

"I don't want to quarrel with you on account of this affair. Common sense will tell you that I am right. My children are my first consideration, please remember that. Once before I allowed your influence to rule me and my little boy has been suffering ever since as a con-

sequence."

Alice winced and averted her face. And what a hideous face it was. It was convulsed with unspeakable hatred directed at the innocent cause of her defeat.

She was wise enough to hold her tongue right now. She had learned that Phil was not the man to brook defiance once his anger was aroused. She darted a venomous glance at the governess.

"Miss Desmond," Phil said to the latter, "I want you to continue your effectionate care of the children. You'll do that, won't you?"

"Yes," Marie replied in a scarcely audible whisper.

"And if you encounter any difficulties, I want you to come to me," he urged. "Don't consult anyone else, but come to me."

"I will," she promised. "May I go now?"

Phil gave his permission with a silent nod.

Marie withdrew hastily. In the hall outside she paused, a flood of tears relieving her fearful strain of the short and yet so decisive interview.

Deep gratitude for Phil, who had so nobly defended her filled her heart. And in that moment she freely forgave him for all the pain and misery she had suffered through his blind jealousy.

Ah, how the sound of his voice had stirred her to her very soul. Ah, how she longed to tell him of her innermost emotions. But she dare not. Between them stood a barrier only grim death could remove.

The moment Alice found herself alone with her husband, she threw all reserve to the winds and burst out in a perfect tempest of fury.

She assailed Phil bitterly for having taken the part of a servant against her. She defied him, she even threatened him, and was on the verge of becoming hysterical. Her angry words were punctuated by sobs.

Philip Gordon, always a gentleman, did not lose his temper. And this beautiful woman, however disagreeable she may be, was his wife.

"Please be sensible, dear," he coaxed. "It won't do for you to get so wrought up. Think of your condition."

"My condition?" Alice flared back. "Much you are about that. If you had the least feeling or even consideration for me, you would not have humiliated me like you did in the presence of servants. I am sorry I engaged that Desmond woman. She practically defied me, her mistress.

"But that is not all. I watched her every moment. The way she looked at you when you took her part made me sick. I don't believe a word of what she says about being so fond of children. In this case it is just a gag to worm herself into your good graces.

"It wouldn't surprise me if she were in love with you right now. She knows she is good-looking and she——"

"Hush," Phil broke in. "You are not responsible for what you are saying right now, Alice. Your imagination is running rampant. We'll discuss that matter when you are cooled off."

When he put a hand on her soothingly, she tossed it aside, rose, and ran from the room. The door was slammed behind her with a crash.

Marie, in the meantime, had returned to the nursery. As she passed through the hall she did not see a pair of malignant eyes follow her.

The possessor of these eyes was Nora Evans.

"I'll make you pay for this," she hissed, making a threatening motion at the disappearing figure of the new governess. "This house is not big enough to hold both of us for any length of time. You may think you

stand in with Mr. Gordon. But that don't mean anything.

"Mrs. Gordon can't afford to offend me and she knows it. I've got something on her. She wouldn't dare consent to my discharge. I could ruin her with a few words if I wanted to talk."

Marie, upon her arrival in the nursery, breathed a deep sigh of relief.

She hugged both of the children to her bosom, then sat down to tell them a story. Little Harry's eyes seemed to become tired and he closed them.

"Do you want to sleep, darling?" She asked tenderly.

"I—I would like to, but I can't," the boy answered. "I wish my real mother was here to sing me a lullaby. She always used to do that, and then I would go to sleep right away."

"Perhaps I could sing you a lullaby," Marie suggested, her voice quivering. "Shall I?"

"Please," begged Harry.

The governess closed her eyes and allowed her mind to drift back to the happy days gone by.

Ah, how well she remembered the song she used to sing to her children. And before she knew it, the old familiar melody burst from her lips.

She sang with a feeling that expressed all the secret longing in her soul. And the boy, with a smile of utter contentment, went to sleep.

The last note of the song had scarcely died away when the door opened and the master of the house came into the nursery. He came slowly forward, his handsome features rather pale.

"I—I happened to be passing and stopped to listen to your song, Miss Desmond," he said. "You have no idea how profoundly it touched me. That song is not

new to me. Someone, who was very, very dear to me used to sing it.

"My—my first wife, whom I am unable to forget had a voice like yours. Hearing you, brought back pleasant memories. As a rule I never speak about my dead and unhappy past to anyone, but I—well, I just can't help it now."

While he spoke thus, his attitude, the tone of his voice, and the sad look in his eyes betrayed the sentiment hidden in his heart.

"I—I consider myself fortunate indeed to have a woman like you to take care of my children," he went on gently. "I want to thank you for your affection for them. It—it makes my burden easier to bear."

"Does it?" she asked without looking at him.

"Yes, it does indeed, Miss Desmond."

Marie had risen and stood with bowed head. She could not have made another reply if her very life had depended upon it.

Philip Gordon, obviously on the verge of breaking down, walked quickly to the door.

But before he closed it behind him, he turned and said:

"Your being here means a lot to me, Miss Desmond. As I told you downstairs, I want you to take complete charge of the children. Do not allow anyone to interfere with your duties. If you encounter any difficulties, come to me. Come to me."

And then he was gone.

A feeling of unutterable happiness took hold of Marie. Phil's words had been sweet music to her ears.

"My first wife, whom I am unable to forget, had a voice like yours." That one phrase kept repeating itself over and over again in her lifted soul.

Could it be possible that he still loved her? Tears

of joy rolled down her cheeks. At least she had the satisfaction of knowing that she, who was believed dead, was not forgotten entirely.

Ah, what a boon for the weary heart of one who had nothing but memories of the past to cheer her.

But that was nothing compared with the knowledge that from this day on she was to have complete charge of her darling babies. There would be no interference not even from the second Mrs. Gordon.

With careful nursing little Harry was bound to recover. Yes, she felt absolutely confident that he would regain his health completely.

With a world of longing in her mother eyes she stood at the side of the bed and watched the boy as he slept. His breath was coming deep, and at regular intervals.

Marie happened to glance at the floor. A suppressed cry broke from her lips, for there lay Phyllis soundly asleep among her toys and dollies.

It was the work of a few moments to pick the child up and carry her to her own bed. This done, the happy mother began to traverse the nursery from one end to the other, happier than she ever had hoped to be.

"Thank God—Thank God!" she murmured fervently. She stretched her hands heavenward, her lips moving constantly in a prayer of thanksgiving.

That night Marie found real rest, physically and mentally, in a most refreshing sleep. And she dreamed the most beautiful dream. All the barriers were broken down, and she was again in the arms of her husband.

But dreams are but dreams!

He was holding her so close that she could scarcely breathe. He was again the passionate lover of old, and he was telling her all the sweet things that had enraptured her in the happy days gone by.

Harry and Phyllis were clinging to her skirt, clamoring for attention. She could hear their voices as they pleaded as only love-hungry children can plead.

Oh, the ecstacy of the moment. Marie was enjoying every second of it in her most wonderful dream.

But dreams are only dreams!

Chapter 43

GHOSTS

DURING the next few weeks, Marie successfully downed all disagreeable sensations which assailed her when she came in personal contact with the woman who had posed as her loyal friend. And the word "posed" is used advisedly, for a real, sincere feeling of friendship had never existed between the former Alice Procter and the first Mrs. Philip Gordon.

As a matter of fact Marie had always sidestepped Alice in a social way, but Alice could not be avoided.

Alice persistently obtruded herself when her presence seemed neither desirable or safe. In Marie Gordon's happy married life she proved to be the she-wolf in sheep's clothing.

Marie found too much time for bitter reflection in the position she held now. She had more than a suspicion that she had been double-crossed by Alice.

And to live with a woman who had proven herself a base traitoress under the same roof, was bound to keep her mind in a turmoil.

But most bitter of all was the realization that she had been deliberately cheated out of her husband.

Employing the most despicable methods, Alice, with her alluring beauty and personal charms, had succeeded in trapping Phil into a proposal of marriage.

However, Marie determined grimly that she would snatch what little happiness she could out of the charred ruins of her life. At least she possessed the affection of her two children, though under the guise of a mere governess.

Another factor which made her existence more bearable was the extremely kind treatment she received from Phil.

Ah, how she loved the sound of his voice when he came into the nursery, as he frequently did, to inquire about the children. Again and again he assured her of his gratitude.

"God must have sent you to us, dear Miss Desmond," he said to her one evening. "Your coming was a blessing to my poor motherless children. They love you."

"And I love them," she answered without daring to meet his eyes.

Conditions in the Gordon household left nothing to be desired, Marie concluded.

She had the respect and esteem of every other servant with the exception of Nora Evans. But this really did not matter a great deal, for Nora confined her activities to the boudoir of Mrs. Gordon.

In her work of taking care of the children, Marie had a willing assistant in Annie. Many an hour these two passed talking over old times.

They could be seen walking through the grounds every night, arm in arm, like the best of friends.

They got keen enjoyment out of exploring the neighborhood estates. But they rarely went near the tower which stood so forbidden in the rear of the magnificent Gordon summer home.

Somehow the rumor had been spread that this tower was haunted. No one seemed particularly anxious to explore its interior.

It was a sort of an ornament to the big house, a relic of feudal days when a hiding place for crimes was deemed necessary.

Philip Gordon had been in it only once. The damp

atmosphere, and the uncanny whirr of flying bats caused him to leave rather hurriedly without making a complete survey.

He recalled his visit afterward with a shudder, and never evinced any desire to repeat it.

At his suggestion the door to the tower was locked and he forgot even where the key was being kept. His many business and social engagements eliminated further thoughts about the tower from his mind.

One night the Gordons had quite a number of visitors whom Alice entertained in her usual lavish style.

Marie had gone to her room to retire for the night, when she suddenly became aware that someone ran through the hall in evident haste. The footsteps halted in front of her door. She waited for a knock which did not come.

The next instant Annie bursted into the room, pale and out of breath.

"What is the matter?" the governess inquired uneasily.

"Oh, Miss Desmond," the girl exclaimed. "I had such a fright a few minutes ago when I passed the tower. And it is really haunted. I saw it with my own eyes."

Marie laughed.

"What did you see?" she asked, still laughing.

"It was a dark, ghost-like shadow," Annie explained. "And there was a faint,bluish glow around it which suddeny went out. What do you suppose that was? Mr. and Mrs. Gordon are with their guests in the drawing room, and none of the servants would venture near the tower especially at night. But somebody is in there alright. It must be a ghost."

Marie suppresed another laugh, for the girl's very evident fright apparently had some foundation.

"Nonsense, Annie," she said in her usual quiet

manner. "There are no such things as ghosts. You may read about them in stories but they don't actually exist. I am afraid your imagination is responsible for what you saw."

"Don't you believe it for a minute," the girl maintained strongly. "There is somebody in the tower, if it isn't a ghost it is a living, breathing being."

The governess merely smiled.

"You are not quite so sure about it being a ghost now, are you?" she remarked casually.

"Maybe it isn't," the girl replied, willing to admit that she might be mistaken. "And by the way, Miss Desmond, did you hear the latest? The cook told me this morning that someone is robbing the pantry systematically And it is being done over night."

"Robbing the pantry?" Marie exclaimed, her mind keenly alive to this sudden twist in the conversation. "Why, I can't believe it."

"But it is true," came back insistently. "Leftovers and fruit have been disappearing from the pantry for a week. Whoever the thief is surely keeps his tracks well covered."

Marie did considerable thinking during the silence which followed.

Annie's report indeed furnished food for thought. Someone had been seen prowling about in the tower, and someone was stealing food. It was a puzzle that should not be hard to solve.

"I am going to the tower right now and see for myself," she announced with determination. "Will you go with me, Annie?"

The latter acquiesced with evident reluctance.

"You don't have to accompany me if you are afraid," Marie said.

"Oh, I am not afraid, Miss Desmond," quaver-

ingly.

"Alright, then. Come."

Supplied with an electric torch, the two women left the house through the rear exit and walked briskly in the direction of the tower.

The door, which was supposed to be kept locked, opened with a creak. The interior was filled with stale, musty air.

They were about to climb the winding stairway leading to the upper floor, when suddenly there came a loud crash. It souded as if someone had slammed a door with great violence.

Annie uttered an exclamation of fright, and clung to her companion.

"I—I am afraid," whispered the trembling girl.

"There is nothing to be afraid of," Marie encouraged. "Come on."

But the next instant both women halted. Something like a low, agonized wail came from above. There was a short interval of tense silence, then it was repeated several times.

"Oh, let us get out of here," gasped Annie, her teeth chattering.

"No," answered the other resolutely, fighting her own fear. "I have come this far and I won't leave until I know what goes on in here."

On they went. Disturbed by the brilliant shaft of light from the electric torch, several huge bats began to circle around them, flopping their wings and striking against objects in the way. But the wailing sound had stopped.

The two women stood now in what appeared to be a narrow hall. Two doors were visible in the wall to the right. Both doors were closed, and for a moment Marie halted, undecided what to do next.

Fearless though she was, she could not repress a shudder at the deathlike silence about her.

Then, an instant later, a low moan coming from behind one of the doors roused her to action.

Shaking off Annie's restraining hand, she tried to open the first door and found it locked. Turning to the other, she turned the knob.

The door yielded, and holding the flashlight in an elevated position, she advanced cautiously into the room.

As her eyes became accustomed to the gloom beyond, she saw a figure crouched in the farthest corner. It was the figure of a woman—a young woman.

At the first glance she recognized her. It was none other than Ruth Gordon, the unfortunate sister of Phil.

The picture she presented was indeed awe-inspiring. Her clothing was disarranged. Her hair was disheveled, and she groveled on the floor like some hunted animal.

"Ruth—Ruth!" Marie cried, staring with unbelieving eyes. "Good heavens, is it you?"

The girl started up at the sound of the voice. There was an unsteady light in her roving eyes. Marie went up to her and spoke gently.

She used the same terms of endearment she had uttered time and again to the girl in the happy days gone by.

Ruth Gordon, not able to see the features behind that blinding electric torch, straightened up suddenly. The wild expression fled from her eyes. Intense surprise found expression in them.

"Marie — Marie, oh thank God, you have come back!" she sobbed. "They told me that you had lost your life in a terrible explosion. I am so happy you are here. You'll help me, won't you?" she went on piteously. "You

won't let that horrible woman drag me back to the insane asylum, will you?"

Marie's heart beat frantically. Ruth had recognized her by her voice. There was no longer any doubt about that. She had betrayed herself.

She realized instantly what it would mean if Ruth persisted in her belief and communicated it to others. Something must be done at once to shake that belief.

Her brain worked quickly—feverishly.

"You are mistaken," she said, changing her voice so that it sounded very harsh. "I am not the woman you evidently think me to be. Mrs. Marie Gordon was killed by that explosion. She is dead. I am the governess of the children. My name is Desmond—Marie Desmond."

Ruth was clinging to the speaker's arm.

"You can't deceive me," she declared with conviction. "That voice of yours brought back to me all the happy hours you and I spent together. You are Phil's first wife, and you can't make me believe anything else."

"But here," Marie held out the electric torch. "Flash this on my face and see for yourself."

The young girl did as she was told. For a long moment she stared. It was not the face she had known and loved. But the eyes were the same. They were the eyes of her brother's first wife. There could be no doubt about that.

Ruth nodded her head as if she were answering the question she had asked herself.

"You are Marie Gordon, my sister-in-law," she said slowly. "They can change human faces, but not the eyes nor the voice. Ah, I understand now," she added with a sly smile, "you have come back to take care of your children, and you don't want Phil's second wife to recognize you.

"Well, I don't blame you, for Alice is a she-devil

if there ever was one. She must have been born without a heart, without a soul, and without a conscience. Alice is a fiend, that's what she is."

Marie was about to interrupt the speaker, but Ruth continued hurriedly:

"You are doing a wise thing in keeping your identity a secret, for if that wicked woman suspected who you are, you might possibly share my fate. She would lock you in this tower and starve you to death. Oh, you don't know how cruel she can be. What harm did I ever do her that she should drage me into an insane asylum?

"None at all," the girl went on, answering her own question. "But I was in the way and she wanted to get rid of me. The same thing would happen to you if she knew that you are Phil's first wife, for she found out long ago that Phil will never love her as he did you."

Marie released herself from Ruth's clutching fingers.

"Hush," she warned, her face white and tense. "Please don't say any more. Calm yourself. See how you tremble——"

"No," the wretched young girl broke in. "I must speak, for it does me good to unburden myself to one who understands. I have remained silent long enough. Oh, how Alice tormented me because I insisted that I was perfectly sane. She insisted that I was crazy and had Phil believing it.

"She persuaded my brother into sending me to that awful place. I never thought that he would give his consent. He did, though, because he was afraid to cross her.

"But," she went on with a grin, "they did not keep me there very long. I watched my chance and escaped. A week ago I arrived here under the cover of darkness and hid in this tower. I——"

"How did you manage to keep alive?" Annie inter-

posed at this juncture. "Surely you must have had something to eat."

"Oh, I got plenty to eat from the pantry," replied Ruth.

Marie and Annie exchanged glances.

"That explains the cook's story," said the former, then turned to the young Gordon girl. "But why did you hide in this musty old tower, Ruth? Why didn't you go to your brother?"

"Why didn't I go to my brother?"

"Yes, why didn't you, Ruth?"

Ruth shook her tousled head disconsolately.

"Do you know what would have happened, had I done what you suggest?" she cried vehemently. "He and that woman would have shipped me right back to the insane asylum. And I'll never go back there alive. They can kill me——"

"Hush, Ruth," Marie said, taking a hold of the girl's arm. "I don't believe that your brother would insist upon you being returned to the asylum. You are Phil's only sister and he always loved you devotedly."

"Oh, yes," mocked Ruth. "He loved me until he brought that second wife of his home with him. You don't know the power that woman has over him. She could make him do almost anything. I might tell Phil that I was perfectly sane. But if Alice tells him I am crazy, that settles it.

"God knows my mind is alright now. And I won't go back to that horrible asylum. I'll kill myself first. I would far rather be dead than return to a place where you are buried alive."

"You poor, poor girl," responded Marie with infinite compassion as she stroked the girl's hair. "I pity you with all my heart, but I am afraid I am powerless to help you."

Ruth put out a hand in mute appeal.

"Please help me," she begged piteously. "If you don't, I don't know what will become of me."

The governess reflected for a moment.

"I could speak to Mr. Gordon about you," she suggested. "I feel that he will not deny you refuge in his house."

"If you do that, you seal my doom," the girl cried wildly. Falling upon her knees with both arms extended, she went on with an outburst of passion: "I am the most miserable and forsaken human being on the face of the earth. I have no one to turn to.

"Won't you help me, Marie? Please do. You are the only one, and if you turn your back on me, too, I don't know——"

"I am not going to forsake you, dear," Marie cut in with a tender note in her voice. "I have not forgotten how loyal you always were to me. I have not forgotten how you warned me against—against Alice Procter, the woman who now occupies my place in your brother's home and affection.

Marie paused a moment.

"Yes, I'll help you, but let me think." She lowered her head in the space of silent thoughtfulness which ensued. Suddenly her features brightened. "I'll release you from this self-imposed imprisonment, Ruth. But you must promise me faithfully that you will never reveal to a living soul that I am your brother's first wife. No matter what happens, your lips must remain sealed."

"They are sealed now and will remain so until you give me leave to speak," the girl replied as she kissed Marie.

"Alright," assented the latter. "Come with me and Annie."

"But," Ruth protested, "I am afraid of being seen

if you take me to the house. If Alice should find out that you——"

"She won't find out," Marie promised resolutely. "From this moment on you are under my protection. So far as you are concerned, I cheerfully assume every responsibility."

The unhappy girl clung to her former sister-in-law like a child. Tears of gratitude coursed down her cheeks.

On the way to the house Annie and Marie discussed ways and means to hide Ruth. She must be kept out of sight until her brother could be informed opportunely.

"Why not let her stay in my room?" Annie suggested.

"That isn't a bad idea," murmured the governess. "But we'll have to be careful so Nora Evans doesn't find out Ruth's hiding place. She'd carry the news to her mistress, and there would be plenty of trouble for all of us."

"Indeed there would," Annie admitted with a shudder. "You and I would both lose our jobs."

"Well, I don't think it would come to that," Marie said confidently. "But poor Ruth would doubtlessly be sent back to the asylum. And that is the thing I want to prevent at all hazards."

Like dark shadows the three women approached the rear entrance. There was not a sign of life anywhere. They reached the second floor unobserved, and at once went to Annie's room. Ruth was put to bed quickly. Like a tired, weary child she sank upon the pillows and a moment later was soundly asleep.

In low whispers Annie and the governess renewed the discussion as to what had best be done.

Marie insisted that Philip Gordon should be in-

formed without delay.

"We have no right to withhold from him the fact that his sister has returned," she said. "To hold her here without his knowledge would only serve to prejudice him against Ruth and those who assisted her. Nothing is gained by lying."

"You are right about that," the girl agreed. "But you are taking a desperate chance, Miss Desmond."

The latter produced a more convincing argument.

Annie, of course, was guided by the opinion of her former mistress, and she coincided at once.

The following day Marie patiently waited for an opportunity to speak to Phil alone. As usual he drove to his office at nine in the morning and did not return until about four in the afternoon.

Marie was romping with little Phyllis on the lawn when she saw him coming.

As soon as he perceived her on his way from the garage to the house, he changed his course. The next moment he stood before her with a kindly smile on his handsome face.

"How is my boy to-day?" he inquired, a note of anxiety in his voice.

"I think he is doing nicely," the governess answered without meeting his eyes. "If he keeps on improving I shall have him down here playing on the lawn with us in a few weeks."

"That is glorious news indeed, my dear Miss Desmond. It makes me very, very happy."

With these words he turned away and moved toward the house. Just then little Phyllis, having spied a beautiful butterfly, ran after it with shouts of delight.

Her purpose of catching the golden-hued insect took her farther and farther away in the direction of the pavilion.

This was Marie's opportunity, and she quickly seized it.

"Mr. Gordon," she called. "Oh, Mr. Gordon."

Phil whirled about.

"May I speak to you for a moment, please?" begged the governess.

He stopped and turned his head slightly.

"What is it?" he inquired in his usual gentle tone when he stood face to face with Marie.

"There—there is something you must know, Mr. Gordon," she began, and she related the incident of the night before. She told him about finding his sister Ruth in the tower in a straight-forward manner. "I feel so sorry for the poor girl, and I hope you will deal leniently with her," she ended.

Gordon seemed so agitated that he did not notice the tearful plea in the voice of the governess.

Under ordinary conditions he would doubtlessly have wondered why this woman, an utter stranger, should take such an interest in his unfortunate sister.

"I will be lenient with her," he said gravely. "Take me to her at once."

Marie called Annie to watch little Phyllis, then she lead the way to the house. Gordon's eyes grew moist and his lips trembled as he beheld the ravaged face and the wasted form of his only sister.

The voice of his conscience accused him loudly of the cruel wrong he had committed at his wife's instigation. Yes, he pleaded guilty in silence of having acted with inexcusable brutality toward Ruth.

The young girl was sleeping peacefully. She was but a shadow of her former beautiful self.

The cheeks were hollow and the eyes sunken. Her sensitive mouth expressed untold agony.

Continued in next number

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